

2005

State of the Town Forum

Sunday, November 6, 2005

1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Hingham High School

AGENDA

1:00 p.m.	Welcome and Progress Report
1:15	Financial Overview
1:30	Education Priorities
1:45	Land Use Priorities
2:00 - 4:00	Community Discussion

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BOARD OF SELECTMEN

The work of the office of the Board of Selectmen is generally divided into “Operations and Management” (administrative functions) and “Budget and Policy” (executive functions). The Selectmen serve, primarily, in the executive role, while the Town Administrator oversees the administrative functions and general town operations and reports to the Board of Selectmen. Because policy is expressed and influenced by operational issues, the Administrator often consults the Selectmen. Similarly, the Selectmen continuously review town operations in order to ensure that town policies (within their responsibility) and budgets are appropriately aligned.

The continuing challenges that face the Board of Selectmen, and most town departments, revolve around three distinct areas: financial resource management; delivery of town services; and land use and livability issues.

The financial resource management challenges that face us in the 2006 budget year include rising health care and energy costs; special education funding; appropriate budgetary use of non-recurring large scale permitting fees; and long term feasibility of sustaining current town services without new development or operational overrides. The Board is assisted in the preparation of finance and budgeting policy by our Town Accountant/Finance Director, in close consultation with the Advisory Committee and the Capital Outlay Committee.

The delivery of public safety and public works services are directed by highly skilled professional managers who report directly to the Board of Selectmen. Challenges in public safety include ensuring that the type and distribution of public safety resources deployed in our town match the changing needs of our population. Our focus in recent years in community policing has driven much of the organizational development and change in the Police Department, and we have now fully solidified our Fire Department’s commitment to excellence in the delivery of emergency medical services while exploring the next phase in the evolution of the department – emergency management planning, both locally and regionally.

The land use and livability issues revolve around maintaining our water supply and planning a wastewater management strategy; managing the attendant effects of continuing residential, office and commercial development, including traffic and congestion issues; maintaining and enhancing the viability of the downtown area; and creating affordable housing.

We address the aforementioned challenges by exercising our critical analysis and judgment, thoughtfully and impartially, as your representatives in all executive matters relating to the will of the town. The Board also works closely with our state and Federal legislators to ensure appropriate recognition of Hingham’s will as a political body in the Commonwealth on issues of local and regional import. Last, but certainly not least, the Board appoints, convenes and participates with town boards, committees, and department heads to coordinate their good work on town matters. In all of the areas of responsibility, the Board, through a strong and unwavering commitment to open government, seeks to be available to any and all citizens who seek to be heard on any issue.

Beyond the perennial role of maintaining strong fiscal management and creating policy on town affairs, the Board of Selectmen, annually, meets publicly to set the short term goals of the town. The following short term goals, in order of importance, were agreed upon this year:

- Strengthen the Building Permit/ZBA application and enforcement process;
- Create and implement a Selectmens' Communication Plan, a program for increasing the frequency and depth of communications regarding issues and decisions in which Selectmen are involved;
- Create a Citizen's Preparedness Plan for the imminent opening of the Greenbush Line, helping citizens (particularly children and other special "at risk" groups) understand changes in traffic flows and safety issues related to the opening of the Greenbush line;
- Work with the Planning Board and other elected and appointed boards to prepare a comprehensive neighborhood plan for the Beal Street neighborhood to better accommodate neighborhood changes related to increased development in the area;
- Continue work towards effecting the transfer of state owned lands near Bare Cove Park to the Town;
- Take further steps to create more detail for the Downtown Master Plan, including a project plan with discrete, well defined phases and funding sources;
- Create a Hingham Transit Plan to link population centers with regional transportation nodes (e.g., the Commuter Boat, Park and Ride and Greenbush stations) and connect neighborhoods and special populations (e.g., children and teenagers) with activity and recreation centers in town;
- Examine current organization of volunteer committees in Hingham;
- Complete all public aspects of the Project Turnabout land swap;
- Complete permitting of the DPW facility and recreational fields at Bare Cove Park.

Other continuing goals from 2005 on which the Board continues to work include:

- Improve recycling, through assessment of current practices and creation and implementation of new guidelines;
- Issue RFP and review proposals for affordable housing at school track IV.

In summary, the job of the Board of Selectmen is to maintain a long term view of the direction of the town while making sure that day-to-day operations support the best expectations of all citizens. We define challenges, discuss solutions openly, create goals and act when required with the authorization of Town Meeting and the Great and General Court.

HINGHAM POLICE DEPARTMENT

Our response to unprecedented growth has and will continue to tax our ability to offer a seamless delivery of services. Our inability to effectively and efficiently communicate across a broad spectrum has left us vulnerable. Bringing back a seamless delivery of service and providing for true interoperable communications is the challenge. In order to meet the challenge several steps must be undertaken within a short period of time.

Planning:

Emergency management personnel need to develop a true interoperable communications platform funded by the Town in which all-public safety personnel will have confidence. Current personnel strengths are well below that required to continue to deliver services at the level the townspeople need and have become accustomed.

Training:

Funding to meet the current and future demands of public safety personnel crosses into every facet of Town government. Every Department has a stake in public safety from DPW to Health to Schools to Fire to Inspectional Services to the Selectmen and all other Town departments. Comprehensive training on at least an annual basis to determine our readiness and to hone our collective skills in a number of demanding scenarios needs to be ingrained in our budgets.

Traffic Safety:

No day seems to go by without traffic-safety being a dominant theme in our lives. The re-shaping of the Town's roadways to meet the build out of the Town places demands upon this Department unlike any in the past. To meet those demands this Department has aggressively pursued training opportunities in motorcycle applications and operations, railroad safety as well as truck enforcement together with an aggressive selective enforcement effort. Funding for traffic crash investigations is necessary to maintain the readiness of the Department's traffic officers.

Community Involvement:

We continue our outreach efforts through community partnerships, some of which are the Citizen Police Academy, its alumni association, neighborhood watch programs, DOT approved car seat installations, free home and business security surveys, TRIAD, our collaborations with the South Shore Women's Center and the Plymouth County DA. Also our DARE program and our School Resource Officer program in cooperation with the School Department are further evidence of our efforts. The aforementioned are but a portion of our past, present, and future commitment to the community. Seniors, women and children all deserve our 'special' attention but to fulfill their needs requires a special commitment from the Town.

Transition:

The Police Department needs a minimum number of personnel to effectively and efficiently provide the best measure of protective services. In order to fulfill the immediate and future needs of the Department a build-out model must be in place. The model is to be based upon current and

predicted demographics, high risk security, special investigations/analysis, school related issues, special population issues, number and types of calls for service, geographic sector assignments and personnel development.

HINGHAM FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

The Fire Department is currently engaged in several large-scale projects. Primary among them is the addition and renovation project for the Central Fire Station. The current Central Fire Station was built in 1942 and there has never been a major upgrade to the facility since then. In 1942 the department responded to 311 emergency calls. Today the average is 3500 emergency responses per year, a number that continues to climb. The update to the current building includes a new Emergency Operations Center and additional apparatus space that will accommodate the much larger apparatus that is in use today. We will also have a much improved training, maintenance and administrative facility. The recent events in the Gulf have reinforced the need for a modern up-to-date fire department headquarters and emergency operations center. It is an exciting project and we look forward to its completion.

The department is also very involved in the many building projects that are taking place throughout the community. Linden Ponds, The Derby Street Shoppes, the new Blue Cross and Blue Shield Building and the Greenbush Restoration Project all present significant challenges in pre-fire planning, fire prevention and emergency response.

In April, a second ALS ambulance was placed in service to meet the additional demands that have been placed upon us due to an expanding and aging population. With the second ambulance we have been able to provide much improved and faster medical services. We can now provide ALS ambulance service to two calls simultaneously. This reduces our dependence on mutual aid and results in much faster ambulance transport to local hospitals. As both ambulances are getting more use than anticipated, a review of the capital replacement program is in order.

Our Emergency Management Function continues to expand as the country and the community becomes increasingly aware of the need to be prepared for any type emergency. We cannot stress enough the need for each family and each resident to have emergency plans in place. Feel free to contact us if we can assist you in developing your family's plan. We all have a personal responsibility to be ready.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

The major challenge facing the Department of Public Works at this time is determining how we can best continue to meet our obligation to provide necessary and essential services, without the benefit of adequate buildings or facilities. The Department is now working out of four different buildings, all of which are in need of extensive repairs. Most of the buildings are undersized and none were designed or constructed for the current use. Our stockyard is located in a residential area on leased land and our equipment housed in various locations throughout Town. This results in a slower response time, duplication of functions, and inefficiency in providing necessary services. This inefficiency is of extreme concern when it hinders our ability to provide essential services such as emergency roadway repairs, hazard tree removal, and snow and ice control.

Funds are now in place for the construction of a new storage building on the School Tract off of Fort Hill Street, and plans for a consolidated DPW Facility and recreational fields are still in the permitting phase. How long it will be until the Department of Public Works is fully consolidated remains unclear. However, it is clear that continued proper and efficient functioning under the current conditions as well as during the upcoming transition period will be most challenging.

Changing waste disposal regulations and increasing waste disposal fees also continue to impact the Department of Public Works. We are fortunate to have a contract in place with the SEMASS trash to energy facility for the hauling and incineration of household rubbish until 2015. However, we have no such contract for bulky waste and demolition. At this time we are disposing of these items at the Bourne Landfill and will likely continue to do so until the State Department of Environmental Protection issues its long overdue new regulations for bulky waste and construction demolition. Other uncertainties include the continued disposal of DPW wastes such as street sweepings and catch basin cleanings, and long term plans for chipping of brush and composting leaves and grass. With final capping of the landfill slated for as early as 2006, these issues will need to be dealt with in the very near future.

We continue to work with the Board of Selectmen and Long Range Solid Waste Disposal Committee on ways to increase recycling through enforcement of waste bans and public education. Early last year we contracted with North Shore Recycled Fibers for the pick up, transportation, and processing of all our recyclables. We have already seen a significant reduction in our transportation costs and our recyclables are being picked up and processed in a timely manner. Recent renovations to the recycling area were undertaken to make this portion of the Transfer Station safer and more user friendly, and we hope these changes will encourage more recycling by residents. Remaining work includes the long overdue renovation of the baler building which we now use to process and store recyclables, and final capping of the former landfill. Both of these will be costly to complete but they are also both long overdue and unavoidable expenses.

Our vehicle and equipment inventory remains relatively stable even though we have deferred the purchase of several trucks and pieces of equipment recently. Working with the Advisory Board and Capital Outlay Committee we have updated and repaired one of our trucks rather than replace it, and have deferred the replacement of one of our large mowers to allow us time to

evaluate potential cost savings through privatization of these services. The fact that a recent detailed cost analysis showed that presently it is more desirable and more cost effective to continue performing these services “in house” speaks to the efficiency of our current operations. We will however continue to evaluate methods of increasing productivity and decreasing operating costs through interdivisional cooperation, regional purchasing, employee training, and efficiency enhancement.

Despite several years of scaled back Chapter 90 (State Cherry Sheet) funding, Hingham’s roadways, drainage, sidewalks and other related infrastructure remain in relatively good shape, thanks in large part to increased funding in our Road Building Account and strict enforcement of the Town’s Rules and Specifications Governing Street Excavation. Recent roadway reconstruction includes Kilby Street, Old County Road, and Pioneer Road. In addition, we performed intersection improvement work at Free/High and Main and at Cushing/South Pleasant and Main, and have expanded or revised pavement markings and signage in several areas as part of the Selectmen’s goal of “Complete Streets.” We are also working with the Board of Selectmen and Traffic Committee to incorporate additional “Complete Street” recommendations into our future roadwork plans.

In addition, we have already reconstructed approximately half of route 228 with TIP funds, and we expect to do the second half starting next year, also using TIP or other state and/or Federal Funds. Given the impact the Greenbush Railroad Reactivation Project has had on Hingham Square, it is expected that the majority of our road building and Chapter 90 funds for the next several years will be committed to restoration and renovating the square. With roadway construction and fuel costs rising at a rapid rate, it is unclear what the future holds. What is clear, however, is that if the Town does not continue to maintain a sufficient budget for roadway repairs and infrastructure improvement, we will ultimately be faced with significantly deteriorated roads that are difficult and costly to repair.

DEPARTMENT OF ELDER SERVICES

The Department of Elder Services is the focal point for the delivery of critical social services to Hingham's population 60 and older and provides opportunities that enable older adults to remain independent active members of the community. The following goals have been developed to assist the Department of Elder Services in continuing to fulfill this mission over the next several years.

Senior Center Accreditation - As discussed last year, accreditation is an official recognition that a local senior center is effectively meeting its mission as granted by the National Institute of Senior Centers. Funding for accreditation is included in the Elder Services fiscal year '06 budget. .

The first step in this process is a self-assessment of nine standards of operation for a senior center. These standards are broad in nature and include the Senior Center's programs, mission statement, personnel and fiscal management. In September 2005, a Self-Assessment Committee was developed and includes staff, Elder Services Board members, volunteers, community agencies and senior center participants. It is expected that the Self-Assessment Committee will complete its work by late February 2006. Following the Self-Assessment, an on-site peer review will be scheduled by the end of the fiscal year.

Boomer Ready – One of the most important challenges and long range goals for the Department of Elder Services will be to meet the social service and program needs of the baby boom population. Not only will demand on programs and services increase, but it is expected that the types of programs and services that will be needed and expected will vary.

Defined as those individuals born between the years of 1946 and the mid 1960's, baby boomers will reach age 60 in a steadily increasing wave starting in 2006. Among the emerging issues that have been identified are community participation, community-based supports including caregiver support and transportation, and housing.

Through a revision of the current five-year plan and areas identified during the Senior Center Accreditation process, the Department of Elder Services will develop a blueprint for operations and identify long-term strategy to meet this challenge.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

After a record four-night 2005 Annual Town Meeting marathon, driven by a long backlog of thoughtful issues, the Advisory Committee looks to 2006 as a return to a 'more normal' town meeting. The Budgetary backdrop is as follows:

REVENUES:

-At this time, we project level state aid revenue for FY 2006 and the next several years (though net state aid, after assessments, has been declining for the last several years). Fiscal planning is certainly easier when state aid is predictable.

-One good piece of news that took effect last year is the Commonwealth's Special Education 'circuitbreaker' formula which takes some volatility out of the budget equation; it too becomes more manageable.

-While Proposition 2 ½ continues to constrain the town's ability to raise taxes, new growth in the town has provided a good stream of additional revenues. We expect this to continue; some of FY 2006 building permit revenue will transition to normal new growth, but building permit revenue itself continues at high levels due to Linden Ponds and the Shipyard projects.

EXPENSES:

-The unprecedented level of 2005 snow removal cost sent us into the current FY 2006 with no Reserve Fund carryovers. Use of several other 'excess reserves' to meet high priority FY 2006 capital requirements means we will be stretched thin in addressing the level of deferred capital projects put off during the recent lean years. Key continuing needs include a) the DPW consolidation project, b) increased public safety capital equipment replacements and additions to deal with new growth c) several large school projects and d) the Bare Cove fields project.

-Operating budget pressures continue. While minor straying from the level funding 'mandate' of the last several years was possible in the FY 2006 budget, the pent up demand to address department needs (understaffing and overwork) is still present. There is a limit to how long we can continue to ask our town departments to provide more services to meet the growing town population on the same budget.

OVER THE LONGER TERM:

-There is every expectation that the School Facility Study Committee will generate a demand for major capital expenditure for a new or significantly expanded school in the mid-term future. Also, like all Massachusetts towns, Hingham faces the requirement by FY 2009 to address unfunded post employment benefits (e.g., health care, etc.) for its employees; costs are going up and people are living longer. The actuarial estimate of this unfunded obligation is approximately \$80 million.

GENERAL:

-We strive to recommend to the citizens at Annual Town Meeting a budget which will continue to address some of the deferred expenditure backlog without committing the town to an unsustainable level of annual expense growth. We also aim to provide recommendations on all non-budgetary warrant articles that reflect thoughtful consideration of the issues, with input from the widest cross section possible of those citizens in the town affected by the warrant article's substance.

-Finally, we commit to further extending our initiative commenced last year to make our process and deliberations as participatory and transparent as possible by full use of the town's website and active sharing with the media of scheduled meetings and agendas.

CAPITAL OUTLAY COMMITTEE

The Capital Outlay Committee (CAPITAL) is charged with:

- Ascertaining the Capital Outlay requirements of various Town Departments, Boards and Committees over the next six years. Any expenditure for equipment or real property costing \$5,000 or more is defined as a capital outlay.
- Analyzing and evaluating proposed capital expenditures for all Town Departments, Boards and Committees and making recommendations to the Board of Selectmen (SELECTMEN) and the Advisory Committee (ADVISORY).

The CAPITAL process followed each year consists of:

- Each Department producing, at the start of the budget process, current year capital outlay requests, and a realistic five-year capital outlay request.
- CAPITAL reviews requests with the Department Heads, Boards and Committees.
- Needs are determined and possible alternatives are discussed. Departmental requests are categorized into one of three types:
 1. Public Safety
 2. Critical to the operations of a Department
 3. Enhancements to a Department
- CAPITAL makes its recommendations to the SELECTMEN and ADVISORY.
- SELECTMEN accept, alter, or reject CAPITAL'S recommendation, and forwards it to ADVISORY.

While CAPITAL has met the Public Safety and infrastructure needs for past years, challenges lie ahead. Over the long run, most capital spending on infrastructure cannot be considered discretionary. Overall Capital needs of the Town are not going to be met by the \$2M - \$2.5M of free cash and user fees that are currently projected for Capital allocations.

Challenges the Town will face include:

- The growing requirements from the Schools for capital.
- The South Shore Country Club, while self-funding, will require significant capital expenditures to keep it competitive; continue to attract business; and, maintain a Town architectural treasure.
- The DPW's need for equipment and for the Bare Cove Park project
- The non-critical capital requirements that continue to be "pushed" out to "next year" that will eventually need to be addressed. Examples include: auditorium seats; tennis courts; and a new library roof.

BOARD OF ASSESSORS

The Board of Assessors is pleased to report that overall the department is running well and that we are currently fully staffed, with a talented and knowledgeable group of people. That is not to say that the Assessors Office is not without challenges as we go into the future. The incredible amount of new growth in the next five to ten years will greatly impact our office's resources. We are currently taking steps to limit the impact, with new software and computer components as well as a Geographical Information System (GIS). The GIS is now operational and being installed in all departments. This system will help our office track and report the new additions to the tax base as well as have countless uses for other departments.

This past year we successfully passed the rigorous Department of Revenue re-certification of the real estate values and the procedures and reporting of the values on real estate and personal property in the Town. This certification is performed every three years and is to make sure the assessments are fair, equitable and reflect market values. This process is performed in house as opposed to hiring an outside contractor which is the norm in most towns. Although, this puts a severe strain on the staff, the end product is more accurate and better reflects the Hingham real estate market. Who better to value the town than the people who are dealing with the valuation of real estate in Hingham every day? We are now planning for the next certification in 2008. This includes planned changes to up-date land schedules and a revamp of the condominium database.

As mentioned above, the next few years will be a time of rapid growth in the town and keeping up with tracking and estimating value will be difficult. Many of the new projects present unfamiliar valuation problems. Black Rock Country Club, Erickson Development and the Shipyard reuse are all examples of complicated valuation models. The Board of Assessors has asked for funding to hire experts, knowledgeable in these areas. We are currently under contract with a real estate appraiser to help us defend an appellee Tax Board case on the Black Rock Country Club.

The Board will also be submitting a warrant article this year to increase the benefits for the married elderly category. Last year the Town Meeting article to raise the limits on income and the exemption for the single elderly was successful. It is only right that the married elderly exemption keep in step.

Adopting a modification of clause 41C of the Massachusetts General Laws will change the income and asset requirements of the 41C exemption for the married category. The change to the single category was changed at last years Town Meeting, so that the limits for a single person are greater than for a married couple. This change will bring the income and asset level back into their prior ratio with the single levels. The current levels limit the exemption to only the very poor of Hingham and excludes many elderly who need the assistance. The new limits will possibly allow some elderly residents to stay in town who otherwise might have to leave due to the high tax bills.

	<u>Current</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Income Limits:	\$15,000 Married	\$30,000 Married
Asset Limits:	\$30,000 Married	\$55,000 Married

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

The Community Preservation Committee is comprised of nine members, - one each appointed by and from the Conservation Commission, the Historic Commission, the Planning Board, the Housing Authority and the Board of Selectmen, and four citizens at large, two appointed by the Board of Selectmen and two by the Moderator. The Committee is charged with studying the needs, possibilities and resources of the Town regarding the acquisition, creation and preservation of open space, historic resources and low and moderate income housing and making recommendations to Town Meeting regarding the use of the Town's Community Preservation Fund for those purposes. That fund is composed of a 1.5% surtax on Town real estate taxes effective beginning July 1, 2001, state matching grants payable each October 15 based on the surtax revenues for the fiscal year ending the prior June 30, and interest on the accumulated funds. The total amount that will have been collected by the Fund through June 30, 2006 is estimated at approximately \$4,200,000, including a total of \$1,900,000 in state grants matching the surtax revenues for the fiscal years ended June 30, 2002, 2003 and 2004 and estimated for 2005. The Community Preservation Act requires that at least 10% of each year's Community Preservation revenues be spent or set aside for each of the three Community Preservation categories. The remaining 70% is available for spending on any one or more of the categories as the Committee and Town Meeting see fit.

The Committee recommended and the 2005 Town Meeting approved three historic preservation projects, including a historic preservation construction survey for the Old Ship Meeting House (\$40,000) and the reconstruction and conservation of the historic sign on the Torrent Firehouse in West Hingham (\$36,050). The Committee and Town Meeting also approved a contribution from the Community Preservation Fund of \$50,000 to the Town's Conservation Fund for use by the Conservation Commission in paying for pre-acquisition costs and down payments in connection with the acquisition of open space.

Giving effect to amounts authorized and set aside for spending through June 30, 2005, a total of approximately \$2,400,000 will be available as of June 30, 2006 for additional Community Preservation projects, of which approximately \$100,000, \$100,000 and \$400,000 will be required to be spent or set aside for open space, historic resources and affordable housing, respectively, and the remaining \$1,800,000 may be spent on any one or more Community Preservation categories.

Although the Committee has authorized funding for what it believes to be excellent projects for historic preservation and the protection of open space, to date it has been presented with very few affordable housing projects and, as noted above, substantial unspent funds remain in the affordable housing reserve. The Committee is in active communication with the Housing Partnership Committee and other interested parties in the hope and expectation that substantial and worthwhile affordable housing projects will be presented to it for recommendation to Town Meeting in April, 2006.

HINGHAM PLANNING BOARD

Role of the Planning Board

The establishment of municipal Planning Boards is authorized by Massachusetts General Law, chapter 41, Section 81A. The Hingham Planning Board is an elected board consisting of five members each serving for staggered five-year terms. Among its many diverse roles, the Planning Board is charged with adopting a master plan and official map; conducting studies and plans for submittal to the Selectmen; serving as the local authority for the Subdivision Control Act; adopting Rules and Regulations governing the subdivision of land; reviewing all preliminary and definitive plan submittals; drafting and submitting zoning amendments for consideration by the municipality; serving, in some instances, as the special permit granting authority; conducting Site Plan Review for all Special Permits A-2; and designating and protecting Scenic Roads.

Challenges and Goals

This year, as every year, the Board is faced with the task of reviewing a wide variety of projects, ranging from multi-unit “Flexible Residential Developments” to the rehabilitation of a single building in the Square. Of particular interest currently are the various development projects proposed for Town land. The Planning Board is currently participating in a series of joint meetings with the Selectmen to identify areas of overlapping concern, and to develop collaborative strategies to address those issues. Also of interest is the development of mitigation strategies to address the potential impact of pending development on Beal Street, which is already experiencing increases in the volume and speed of daily automobile traffic.

The Board and its staff provides guidance and staff assistance to the Development and Industrial Commission (HDIC) in their work on improving Downtown Hingham, and the Hingham Housing Partnership in their advocacy for affordable housing, the Community Preservation Committee and the Traffic Committee. Additionally, throughout the year, Board members and staff are also actively engaged in overseeing approved and ongoing construction projects under their jurisdiction. Finally, throughout the year the Board works to identify potential changes to the Town’s zoning by-law that would be brought to Town Meeting in 2006 (see below). This year, the Board is making a special effort to reach out to the community at large to explain the legal basis and function of zoning; and how zoning regulations are created, modified, and enforced.

Over the next 1-5 years the Planning Board hopes to revisit the Town Master Plan, completed in 2001, to review the goals and recommendations contained within, determine which have been accomplished, which remain to be implemented, and which are no longer applicable. The Board will also continue ongoing efforts to clarify and streamline our zoning by-law, and to revise our Subdivision Rules and Regulations to incorporate new construction technology and environmental standards. In all of these efforts, the Board will work to protect the quality of our environment (particularly our water supply); prevent gridlock on our roadways, and provide additional affordable housing for our residents.

In collaboration with the other Town boards and committees, the Planning Board will continue to make every effort to ensure that new development will, on balance, benefit the people of Hingham, and comply with Town goals, policies and regulations.

Proposed Warrant Articles for 2006 Town Meeting:

Massachusetts General Law charges municipal Planning Boards with the role of drafting and submitting zoning amendments for consideration by the municipality. Zoning by-laws can also be submitted “by petition” by a documented resident, with ten signatures by other town residents. When a zoning amendment has been put forward, the Planning Board holds a public hearing to gather public input, and reports its recommendation to the Town Meeting. At this point in time, the Planning Board has already identified several zoning issues to be addressed at Town Meeting this year, and looks forward to considering any petition articles, which may be submitted by members of the public. Petition articles are due at the Selectmen’s Office on December 1 of each year, and public hearings with the Planning Board are held in January and February prior to Town Meeting.

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

The Zoning Board of Appeals administers the Town's Zoning Bylaws by holding hearings and issuing decisions relating to residential, commercial, industrial and municipal development projects. In addition, the Board is the coordinating body for Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permits for the construction of affordable housing.

The current prosperity and popularity of the Town is and will continue to exert strong pressure for both commercial and residential development. Hingham's residential zones are approximately 75% built out, so much of the new construction will be tear-downs. Whether or not we want to control in-fill density, limit the increase in extent of coverage of house lots, particularly in the north end of the Town where many are nonconforming, is a question the Zoning and Planning Board and Town Meeting may want to address.

The Board is cognizant of the concerns about water availability for the future. Appropriate officials and the Town Meeting should consider whether limiting or phasing development is advisable, legal and practicable.

There are Town residents on both sides of the question of relaxing requirements for apartments within existing homes to provide for housing for family members or income for the property owner to defray the property tax burden (i.e. in-law apartments or accessory apartments). Determination of the extent of support facilities needed and size of units allowed needs to be studied along with the desirability of increasing residential density both in sewered and unsewered areas of town.

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

The Hingham Conservation Commission is a seven-member board appointed by the Selectmen to overlapping three-year terms. Originally established in 1959 by a Town Meeting vote, the Commission is empowered by Massachusetts General Laws to acquire open space and promote the protection of the Town's natural resources. Under this mandate, the Commission has acquired over 1,030 acres of open space scattered throughout the community. Stewardship of these properties is an on-going process by the Commission, often assisted by civic groups and dedicated individuals. The Commission is planning to ask Town Meeting to protect additional open space next year.

The adoption of the Community Preservation Act by the Town Meeting has aided in acquiring open space to be placed under the stewardship of the Conservation Commission. This new funding source allows the community to set aside valuable open space parcels that would otherwise be lost to development.

While the Commission may have been established to be ombudsmen for the Town's natural resources, the creation of the State Wetlands Protection Act gave the Board regulatory authority over the work proposed in and near wetlands as well as along streams on public and private property. The enforcement of the local and state wetland protection laws and the Rivers Protection Act during an era of unprecedented development consumes a great deal of time and energy of the Commission and its staff. Additionally, the implementation of the Chapter 40B regulations, which were enacted to promote the construction of low and moderately priced housing, has had an impact on the Town's natural resources. Use of this regulation by land developers allows greater density of construction than current local zoning allows. Almost without exception the land selected for this type of use is marginal at best. The natural resources are then further diminished and the Town's infrastructure is placed under greater strain.

Water, one of the most basic of needs is the community's natural resource inventory is at a critical point in the Town's history. A safe yield of water from the Weir River Watershed must be achieved by the commercial water provider and private well owners. This small watershed supplies Hingham, Hull and portions of Cohasset, Norwell and Weymouth and is our only source at this time. The Weir River has been declared a "high-stressed" basin by the Massachusetts Water Resources Commission this year. This means that greater review and restrictions will be placed on current and new water use. Excessive harvesting of this limited supply will reduce the base aquatic flow to our streams, ponds, wetlands and the Weir River Estuary.

The Conservation Commission is working with state and local agencies and citizen volunteers to address the myriad of environmental issues vital to Hingham's residents. The protection and enhancement of the natural resources of the community improves the quality of life for all our citizens.

WATER SUPPLY COMMITTEE

The Water Supply Committee (WSC) is an oversight committee charged with maintaining a Water Supply Policy for the Town of Hingham, and monitoring adherence to this policy among the various water-supply-related entities. The WSC is working on a number of concerns relative to long-term planning to best ensure that we have an ample water supply for our inhabitants and businesses, in a manner that is economically prudent and environmentally sustainable. Two current issues are included for this report.

Additional Supply Sources:

The State currently limits our water district (Hingham, Hull and a part of Cohasset) to the same level of consumption as averaged from 1981-1986, some 20-years ago. To obtain more water our water supplier (Aquarion) must show that there is a need and that existing water supplies are being used efficiently. For a couple years, the WSC has been closely monitoring the proposal by Aquarion Water Co. (Aquarion) to permit Free St. Well #4 as a new source supply. Aquarion is revising their proposal to address questions raised by the State concerning demand (population projections) and efficient use. Many of the State's comments centered on the need for a coordinated supplier-town approach. The WSC had already begun this coordinated planning process. For example, we requested that the Hingham Wastewater Management Planning Committee expand their membership panel to include a member of the WSC and thereafter, we included a modest degree of water-supply-related topics within the wastewater study. This simple step will greatly enhance the balance between our town's long-term wastewater plan (water discharge) and long-term water supply (water recharge) planning. We expect that additional planning and implementation measures by the Town may be needed to meet certain permitting conditions that the Commonwealth now imposes on all communities that have a serious need for additional water. The WSC is poised to make specific recommendations to the Selectmen and other town Boards if or when they become necessary. It shouldn't be overlooked that although Aquarion is our current service provider, the Town is nevertheless ultimately responsible for our ever-increasing demand for more water.

Efficient use of Existing Supply:

In 1999, the State and Aquarion agreed through a consent order to institute a Water Balance Program, which required that planned developments that increase demand within our water district, must offset their projected water needs with an equal degree of water savings. Over the past few years, leaks and other unaccounted for water have been reduced from some 23% to about 15%. This program of water conservation and recovery may be expanded to include construction of new homes as more demands are placed on our system. The WSC is monitoring both phases of the water balance program including when a complete application has been filed as well as at final review, when the developers have fulfilled their water savings obligation. This two-step monitoring also assists our various Town governing Boards that grant the necessary permits.

This past July, the State re-classified the Weir River as a high-stressed basin. As a result, the State will require that our "unaccounted for water" be reduced over a reasonable time to 10%, and that limits be placed on certain types of summertime consumption. This new standard will

require further water conservation measures, possibly including changes in the Town's by-laws. The WSC will be looking at this and will make recommendations as appropriate.

The WSC usually meets with Aquarion and the public on a monthly schedule. Please attend one of our meetings should you have specific questions or concerns about any water-supply-related matter.

SEWER DEPARTMENT

The Hingham Sewer Commission currently administers two districts, the North Sewer District (NSD) defined by the legislative boundaries established in 1945 and served by the MWRA, and the Weir River Sewer District (WRSD) in the West Corner area served by the Town of Hull.

The NSD is not limited as to capacity, only by geographical boundary. The WRSD has no specific boundary but is limited by capacity which is now completely allocated. The Shipyard project in the NSD will increase flow in that area substantially.

The present treatment rate is \$6.35 per hundred cubic feet of water consumption for the NSD and \$5.45 per 100 cubic feet for the WRSD averaging about \$500 per year per household.

The Town is currently engaged in a detailed analysis of our future needs for wastewater disposal which will most likely result in some areas being identified as candidates for sewer expansion, possibly by enlarging the MWRA service area and/or purchasing additional treatment capacity from Hull. Cost and restrictions on growth will be two major areas of concern in this study.

The Sewer Commission is also undertaking a further examination of sources of extraneous water (I and I) in the system which was last carried out in the 1980's. Sump pumps remain a serious source of concern.

As the standards and cost for septic systems have dramatically risen, the current state of sewer expansion projects is that residents pay the entire project amount through betterments spread out over twenty years at a favorable interest rate. For most this is substantially below the cost of an on site system replacement.

The Department currently employs a field supervisor with two assistants and one part-time assistant; and an office administrator and two part-time assistants.

The Commission is composed of three Commissioners, one each elected annually for a term of three years.

HOUSING PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE

The Hingham Housing Partnership Committee, in its advisory capacity to the Board of Selectmen, explores ways to enhance the diversity of Hingham's housing stock and to meet the Town's housing needs.

The main challenge now and for the foreseeable future involves the development of affordable housing on the "School Depot Tract" of the old Naval Ammunition Depot. At the 2005 Town Meeting, the Town approved Article 42 of the Town Warrant, which authorizes the Board of Selectmen to issue a "Request for Proposals" (RFP) and select a developer to plan and develop an affordable housing project at this site. Since that time, the HHP has been working on drafting a suitable RFP for the Board of Selectmen's approval with an eye to completing a draft by early 2006. Once it is approved, the Board of Selectmen will issue the RFP and invite proposals from interested developers. This process should yield a range of different development options. The Board of Selectmen, with the assistance of the HHP, will evaluate the proposals and select a developer pursuant to Article 42. The HHP views the School Depot project as a critical step toward realizing the Town's long-range commitment to improving the availability of affordable housing in Hingham.

In addition to this project, the HHP is also discussing the possibility of creating a "Housing Trust" as a vehicle for facilitating affordable housing opportunities. This could include the use of CPC funds under the direction of the Town.

The Hingham Housing Partnership Committee welcomes comments and input from all Hingham residents and other interested parties. While HHP meeting dates and times are subject to change, current information about upcoming meetings can be obtained by checking the postings at Town Hall, calling the Selectmen's Office, or visiting the Hingham Town website (www.hingham-ma.com).

HISTORIC DISTRICTS COMMISSION

Hingham has six local historic districts and two national register historic districts. Many of the town's historic assets are located within the districts and, consequently, are protected through local, state and federal laws, by-laws and regulations. This protection has been extremely important for the residences, buildings and historic sites affected by the Greenbush line.

As they were last year, the impacts associated with Greenbush remain a concern for the HDC. Currently, the Commission, after researching numerous products and resources, is consulting with Greenbush abutters to help them determine the types of windows, doors and other elements that offer the best noise-reduction capability. The Commission is also working with town officials to ensure that the fencing, curbing, ventilation and communications equipment that will be installed along the Greenbush corridor meets the historic and aesthetic criteria negotiated by the town. Finally, the HDC is assisting the Hingham Industrial and Development Commission with the selection of historically appropriate materials and features for use in the downtown area.

The Historic Districts Commission is the town's agency charged with preserving and protecting the residences and buildings located within the town's six local historic districts. Through a design review process, the Commission works with property owners to meet their lifestyle and space needs while preserving the historic and architectural integrity of individual structures and surrounding streetscapes.

The appreciation of Hingham's history exhibited by residents, town government and town boards, as well as the cooperation among town departments has been instrumental in maintaining the history and character that make Hingham a desirable place to live. However, extensive development within the town has and will continue to place many historically and architecturally significant structures, not currently in an historic district, in jeopardy of being wholly or partially demolished, or altered to such an extent that the original structure becomes unrecognizable or overwhelmed by massive additions and accoutrements. The Historical Commission's Demolition Delay By-Law, which currently provides for a six-month waiting period, offers limited protection to the properties outside an historic district. Once these homes, barns and other buildings, all a piece of Hingham's history, are torn down, they are gone forever. The Commonwealth's strongest form of protection for historic properties is a local historic district. To date, Hingham residents have approved six historic districts and three extensions to historic districts. In the future the HDC will seek the support of Hingham residents to extend the existing Hingham Centre Local Historic District and to extend the waiting period in the Demolition Delay By-Law from the current 6 months to either 9 or 12 months.

HISTORICAL COMMISSION

The responsibility of the seven-member Historical Commission is to act in the public's interest to preserve and protect the historical assets of the town, most of which are identified in The Town of Hingham Comprehensive Community Inventory. The inventory lists the many historic, architectural and archeological assets of the town, including the homes, churches and other non-residential structures, cemeteries and burial grounds, bridges and landscape elements, monuments and markers that are the visual chronicle of Hingham's evolution and the essence of the town's character, culture and appeal.

People are attracted to Hingham for many reasons, its aesthetic appeal being chief among them. The town's scenic vistas, period homes, charming streetscapes and other historic assets all contribute to Hingham's identity and to a sense of place that is valued by its residents. It is ironic, then, that maintaining these assets has become a serious concern.

An increasing number of residences and outbuildings, many of which are historically or architecturally significant, are being demolished to make way for new houses and other structures. These replacement houses are not always compatible in size or style with the surrounding homes. Many long-term Hingham residents are finding their homes literally overshadowed, and their views lost or compromised by imposing new structures. While tearing down the old to make way for the new may sometimes be appropriate, it is not always necessary. By demolishing older homes rather than looking for ways to restore and/or add on to them, by gutting the interior architectural features of older homes and leaving merely the exterior shell, by building bigger and larger on every square inch of available property, Hingham's treasures are being compromised. We are "shooting ourselves in the foot" by destroying the very history and character people move to this town to enjoy. Hingham is still a town of originals dating back to 1635. To destroy the originals in favor of streetscapes boasting reproductions and "things that look old" diminishes Hingham's inherent value and unique appeal.

The survival of Hingham's history and character for future generations to enjoy depends on the value current and future residents place on preservation. That so much of Hingham's history and character has remained intact is due in large part to the property owners, architects, builders and craftspeople, whose priorities have been to restore rather than replace, to accommodate modern lifestyles by building compatible additions to historic properties, and by respecting streetscapes by ensuring that the new blends with the old.

As the town faces significant development pressures, particularly on older parcels, it is important to readdress our preservation agenda. The present and future challenge is to raise the consciousness level as to what preservation really means, and what preservation means to the future of Hingham.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

There are a number of issues and challenges that face the School Committee in the fall of 2005. The most significant of these is the increasing student enrollment, and the resulting impact on school space. The addition of nearly 700 students over the past ten years (90 more this September than in June 2005), a pre-school population that has doubled in the same period, and the recent NESDEC (New England School Development Council) demographic study and analysis by the Ad Hoc Study Committee all suggest that enrollment growth will continue to strain the capacity of our existing facilities.

The School Committee is looking at both short term and long term responses to the enrollment growth and the shortage of classroom and instructional space, especially at the elementary and middle school levels. Last winter's analysis of the NESDEC study by the Ad Hoc Space Committee affirmed the expectation of approximately 500 additional students over the next ten years. A local census of pre-school aged children has yielded some additional data regarding the number of potential kindergarteners in each district. Some of the anticipated growth is a direct result of new development or the indirect "trickle down" effect of the sale of existing family homes as senior residents move to complexes such as Linden Ponds. The April 2005 Town Meeting authorized the appointment of and funding for a School Space Needs Study Committee. That Committee has begun its work with the most recent activity being the hiring of the architectural firm Ai3 to conduct a facilities review and to develop, for School Committee discussion and action, a range of options to accommodate the expected enrollment. The question of whether April 2006 Town Meeting action will be requested is open at this time. The planning of any future building and/or renovation projects is complicated by changes that are now being made to the state's school building assistance reimbursement process.

Because the planning, funding and approval process for any recommended building program will take several years, the Long Range Planning Subcommittee of the School Committee is looking closely at options for mitigating the impact of the enrollment situation; the three elementary schools and the middle school are already at capacity. Options being explored, some having possible FY 07 budget impacts, are modular classrooms, selective redistricting, larger class sizes, and modifications to current elementary school out-of-district practices.

An annual challenge to the operating budget is keeping pace with the staffing needed to accommodate student growth while maintaining the class size improvements that the community has supported in recent years. Space limitations will, of course, limit requests in this area. As the number of elementary classrooms increases so does the need for additional specialist time. The introduction of Spanish at grades 1 and 2 this year helped in that respect. A request to expand the program to grades 3-5 would have a similar side benefit in that area.

The long awaited elementary reading program adoption is now fully funded. All grades K-3 classes are using the new program along with some grades 4 and 5 "early adopters." The remaining grades 4 and 5 materials will be purchased during the current year for fall 2006 implementation. The planned elementary mathematics adoption, to replace an aging text series with one more closely aligned with state frameworks, will likely impact the FY 07 and FY 08 operating budgets.

Citizens will not be surprised to hear concerns about increasing utilities costs. The FY 06 School Department deficit in that area is currently anticipated to be in the neighborhood of \$150K, so a large increase in utilities accounts can be expected in the FY 07 budget process.

There are some budget pressures that are ongoing. The most significant of these is the cost of special education. Both the increasing severity and the complexity of student needs contribute to costs that increase at a rate well beyond the typical increase in other areas of the school budget. The recent “circuit breaker” legislation has provided some additional state dollars for the most extraordinary needs; but mandated special education costs will continue to consume a disproportionate piece of the budget. Needs continue in the area of professional and support staffing, specialized therapies and home services, and out-of-district tuitions.

It is no secret that public schools are subject to a growing list of mandates and accountability measures, some from the state and some as a result of the federal “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) legislation. Certain of these mandates, such as MCAS testing, require us to provide more support services for students and also reduce instructional time. Others, such as data collection, reporting, and record keeping requirements, intensify the need for additional clerical and administrative resources. A recent Massachusetts Department of Education checklist for school superintendents contained a list of 67 audits, data submissions, grant submissions, notifications, and other mandated reporting obligations that are required annually. The list continues to grow, and both direct and indirect costs result from meeting these requirements.

Each year, usually as part of the budget process, the School Committee is asked to consider new, enhanced, or expanded programs. Typically, these have fallen to the bottom of the priority list as good ideas, but not within the town’s ability to fund. Some examples for future consideration include an extended day for kindergarten, continuing requests for new sports and other extracurricular programs, and the need to address the number and condition of our sports fields. The School Committee is very interested in ascertaining the level of community interest and support for such ideas and would welcome feedback about other programs for which there may be a high priority.

HINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Library faces a number of challenges in 2005-2006. The most significant of these is the annual challenge of securing sufficient public and private funding to meet the public's informational, recreational and educational library needs. In 2005-2006 the Trustees of the Library are placing a high priority on the cultivation of increased private support for the Library services and concurrently making a case for additional municipal support for the purchase of books and other library materials. Currently, the Town does not fund the purchase of library materials. In the absence of additional municipal funding, successful cultivation of private donations will be an important element in meeting the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' minimum materials expenditure requirement [15% of the Library's total budget] for receipt of Direct Aid to Public Libraries. Direct Aid to Libraries [approximately \$30,000 annually] is applied to the purchase of library materials. The Trustees believe public funding should be sufficient to support a "good" library and supplementary private funding should be directed toward making it an "excellent" one.

Another challenge to the Library's budget is the provision of appropriate staffing to manage increased workloads and activities resulting from the opening of the renovated and expanded facility in 2002. With the exception of the addition of a part-time custodian, the Library has not increased its staff in over ten years. Increased usage has been met with more efficient work routines and greater automation, but there is a finite limit to what can be done without securing additional staff. Building an appropriate staffing capacity to meet the community's needs and expectations will remain an on-going challenge for the Trustees and other municipal officials.

Attracting, supporting and maintaining a highly qualified staff is an emerging challenge in need of a comprehensive response. Library employees must be technology savvy and conversant with the "electronic library" to be successful on the job. Training and continuing education opportunities, therefore, must be integrated into every employee's schedule to assure the currency of skills needed for good customer service and the efficient operation of the Library. Given the Library's constrained staffing, making sufficient time available for these activities has been difficult. Similarly, there is the longer term challenge of acquiring the right mix of employee skills to support the Library's substantial investment in electronic service delivery. Job duties will need to be regularly re-evaluated to ensure that the right match of knowledge and skills are present for maximum productivity and performance in a rapidly evolving workplace.

The Library's short-term capital needs include improved parking lot lighting and a new roof. Over the next several years, the Library also needs to consider offering self-checkout stations for users. Self-checkout is a familiar and desired option in most retail settings and most assuredly would be welcomed by many library patrons to alleviate transaction processing bottlenecks during peak activity periods. Over a somewhat longer horizon the Library should undertake a cost-benefit analysis on the feasibility of introducing Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology for the purposes of augmented security and inventory control. RFID is a method of storing and remotely retrieving data from an RFID smart tag or transponder. Although the current cost to "smart-tag" the Library's collection remains substantial, RFID tag costs continue to come down each year. A phased approach to tagging the collection should be explored.

Effective communication with the public remains a key priority and challenge for the Library. The Library's new website (www.hinghamlibrary.org) is an important avenue for the Library to reach its public alongside other more traditional methods. We invite residents to use the site as a way not only to obtain information about the Library but as a way to efficiently and effectively communicate with the Library and its staff.

SOUTH SHORE COUNTRY CLUB

The South Shore Country Club is nearing completion on the installation of a new irrigation system for its golf course. At the 2004 Town Meeting, the residents of Hingham approved a \$1.7 million bond for the construction of the system. Once complete, the system will irrigate the entire golf course, using no more water than the amount used by the old system. The nearly complete irrigation system will make South Shore Country Club's golf course one of the best public courses in the area. The upgraded irrigation system was crucial to keeping the course competitive with other courses in the area.

The swimming pool and tennis program were popular destinations for Hingham residents this summer. The pool is open to the general public daily from the end of June through Labor Day and offers swimming lessons for children ages 3 months to 14 years old. The tennis program provides lessons to children and adults by a tennis pro.

Over the past year, the County Club Management Committee worked with the company that operates the restaurant and function facilities to make a number of improvements to the facility. The two large function rooms have a brighter look, intended to increase the marketability of the facility, thereby increasing revenues to the Town of Hingham.

The County Club Management Committee is looking forward to working with the newly appointed Long Range Planning Committee for the South Shore Country Club. The seven-member Committee will make recommendations regarding the direction of the South Shore Country Club.